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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

RECENT DECORATION IN NEW YORK.

THE MUTUAL LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY, of New York, have lately made a very large addition to their already mammoth office building in Nassau Street, and the entire interior has been newly decorated under the superintendence of Mr. Thos. Harrington, of No. 1591 Broadway. He has had a force of sixty men employed in the building for some months past, and we feel safe in saying that the decoration of the interior of the entire structure, now almost completed, equals anything hitherto attempted on public buildings either in this country or in Europe. All the designs are in white or old ivory, cream and gold, and the ornamentation throughout is either in classical Renaissance or Louis XVI styles.

The floors of the building throughout are of white marble, and there is a marble wainscoting around the walls of the corridors and staircases four feet in height from the ground right up to the eighth story. The door frames and trimmings are also of polished marble, and there is a profusion of carved marble, carved mahogany and patent plaster ornamentations to be seen everywhere. The ceiling of the main office extends to the third story of the building, and is supported by four immense transverse beams forming five panels. The beams rest on Herculean pillars, the capitals of each pillar and the Renaissance scrolls on the beams, which are molded in patent plaster in high relief, as well as the stiling of the ceiling, including the dentals, moldings and brackets thereon, are all one solid blaze of gold on a dark cream ground. The centre of each panel in the ceiling is also in dark cream, and the three feet wide border thereon has the honeysuckle repeat, in plain gold penciled on a dark cream ground. This ceiling alone required 11,000 books of gold leaf. Between the heavily moulded arches of the windows and the ceiling, on one side of the apartment, there are triangular panels filled with life-size classical figures, having flowing draperies all moulded in high relief, the coloring representing old ivory effects. The figures above the windows represent night and morning, agriculture and commerce, etc. The effect of this ceiling is at once rich and splendid, and has that profound feeling of majesty and repose which is possessed by all Greek art. The President's room is a gorgeous apartment; the effect here is gold and white, like that of the other rooms of the building. The pilasters that decorate the walls are picked out with gold lines and have gold capitals. The frieze has heavily moulded gilt swags on a white or pale cream ground. The ceiling possesses a square gilt border of flat Greek ornament and this encloses an oval panel that has also a flat border of Greek ornament in gold, on a pale cream field. The portrait of Mr. Winston, a former President of the Company, painted in oil on canvas, is embedded in the wall in a carved white and gold frame. The marble floor is covered with a large Persian rug. The offices of the Vice-President and the second Vice-President consist of separate suites of rooms having marble floors and trimmings and white and gold classic decorations and Oriental rugs. At every turn in the corridors leading from room to room there are the same marble floors and polished marble dadoes, and at intervals large bouquets of incandescent lights, in multi colored glass shields, sparkle like blazing jewels. The Treasurer has a suite of rooms consisting of two private rooms and three offices for his clerks. All are finished in a delicate pearl gray ground, the ornament being gold. The moulded design on frieze and ceilings are all of the Renaissance order, and the manner in which the decoration has been carried out reflects the highest credit both on the designer and his workmen. Everything possesses pure, refined and intensely decorative effects, and we leave such apartments wondering how any one should sigh for other colors than these light grays and creams contrasting with gold. The doors of each of the offices are of solid mahogany, executed by George Mulligan, 33 East 32d Street, New York, and contain each a large panel of rock crystal.

The President's dining room is a superb apartment finished in classic ornament in gold and white ground. Adjoining this apartment is the President's private dining room, which is a miracle of white and gold, and adjoining this latter is the guests dining room, a small apartment but the gem of the entire building. The walls are colored a pale rose tint, and are ornamented with large oval mirrors, heavily carved oval frames of oak, in Louis the XVI style, and garlands in patent plaster relief, also gilt, and the ceiling has a large panel formed of similar garlands bright with gold and pale rose effects.

There is a large dining room in the eighth story where the numerous officials and clerks of the Company partake of their mid-day meal.

As endorsement of above work, Thos. Harrington has since done the entire of Central Trust Company's building, 54 Wall Street, and Commercial Insurance Company's building, corner of Pine and William Streets; also, building of Fifth Avenue Bank of New York, 44th Street and Fifth Avenue.

ARTISTIC IRON WORK.

IT IS HIGHLY GRATIFYING to note the progress made in artistic iron work, cast and wrought, whether in architectural constructional work for dwellings and other buildings, or countless movable objects that combine utility with ornament, or simply present ornamental features. Bronze itself, is rivalled in the sharpness and clearness with which designs can be rendered in cast iron. The manifold colorings that can be given to iron surfaces have resulted in altogether changing the character of house hardware fittings, now as attractive as they were formerly unsightly. In more elaborate artistic work, the faculty with which designs can be multiplied, assure the possession of fine productions at moderate cost.

The apparent freedom of treatment largely contributes to the effectiveness of wrought iron. Slight variations, the evidence of manipulation, show themselves in repeated parts. More too, can be accomplished by it in open work. Under the hammer of the smith, the iron with its rigid strength, assumes the ductile facility which allows it to realize, to a certain degree, the fantasies of the filagree worker. Technical difficulties are constantly encountered only to be conquered. Instinct and touch appear to share in the rapid manipulative processes. In this art industry, brass, copper, and bronze are often combined with the iron as giving increased richness of effect when carried out in such ornaments as leafage and strap-work. Deep red copper particularly, assorts well and facilitates the production of delicate details by its pliability.

A happy combination of elegance and utility is presented in plant vases for halls, stairway landings and gardens. Eminent landscape painters, as for instance, Claude, have introduced just such vases in their garden-like landscapes to add the charm of human art to that of nature. The range of these extends from the classical to the most capricious forms. One of square form, with sporting cupids at corners, has relief panels representing the four seasons, apparently replicas from sculptural designs. Another is supported by a pillar with leafy capital, which is engirt by the arms of two children in the round; the vase composed of closely wedged stalks developing into outspreading leaves at edge. Antique models, show serpents and dragons for handles and medallions on each side, with smaller ones at base. Some are engirt by pendants held up by children, cast partially in the round or sustained by bosses. Scattered objects, floral and leaf, in basso relievo on body of vase; these connected by tendrils are favorite devices, also medallion heads set in scroll or strap-work. A vase worthy of attention, rests on a pillar embraced by the arms of two children.

It is in garden fountains that some of the most successful efforts of designers in cast iron have been achieved. One of these displays at the base the figure of Neptune among breakers, partly moulded in the round; the stem is composed of stalks of imitative coral encircling a sea syren, while the fountain plays from out of a large nautilus shell.

It has been laid down as a principle of gate design, that the weight of ornament should be at the base, but this is a decided error. The bars and side supports represent the combined strength, and although the base need not be neglected ornaments between bars, either strictly geometric or apparently developed from them, or foliations filling the panels may properly be surmounted by wrought work of the latter description of a lightsome color character, determined by its extent. The eye is led upward, whether by straight lines or foliations, and is seen against the sky or surrounding foliage. Open cresting work, composed of curves, whether simple lines with twisted extremities or a design representing flowers and leaves, arranged in a somewhat pyramidal form may be made to constitute a satisfying finish. A stately gate, with arched frame, itself consisting of straight rods with slight ornaments at half their length, has the inner portion of the arch beautified by elaborate scrolls, this arch again surmounted by still finer work. Connected railing consists of alternating pillar standards supporting vases with panels in character with the gate.

Exquisite examples of chandeliers, for entrance halls, have the body suspended by chains composed of slender links intermingled with various minute devices having facets at various angles to reflect the light, and about which, for further varying of the surface here and there a small leaf projecting or curling in upon itself. The branches for lights are finely wrought. This slenderness of construction is an appropriate tribute to the inherent strength of the material, and contrasts well with more massive surroundings.

Specialties for church structural adornment in iron work are widely varied, while wrought screens take the lead. These should be metallic in expression. In one fine example may be seen foliage clinging to cornice and arch, corbel and cusp, and crochet with capitals of single columns and smaller clustered shafts foliated and flower enriched in copper, to which latter the repousse system is applied. As a matter of course, flowers and leaves are

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THEORY AND PRACTICE IN ART.

BY RUSSELL STURGES.*

formed of separate pieces of metal fixed together. The whole effect is aided by the coloring.

What artistic iron work requires, is inspiring ornamental treatment possessing some of the solid features of Italian work in wood and stone, which is free from mere prettinesses. Breadth of treatment is the great requirement, with absence of innumerable details which display ingenuity of manipulation rather than taste. At the same time, in minor articles, apt to be scrutinized, a nicety of precision should be evinced in the details. Such an article is seen in a tripod in cinque cento style, enriched with lions' feet, masques and mouldings, representing war, music and the vintage, and supporting a circular receptacle with representation of a pastoral scene on cover. Gilding is little resorted to in artistic iron work, except in a style of mosque ornamentation in which a gilded surface is cut through with outlined ornaments showing the metal beneath.

Wrought iron grills, now much in use, afford admirable opportunities for delicate workmanship. A mode adopted at times of rendering a grill more highly ornamental is, instead of filling the whole aperture with one panel, to surmount the main design with a bar crested with light scroll devices. An open double frame, with slight connections, imparts an airy effect to a delicately wrought grill.

The enemy of iron is rust, but enamel paints now made in all desirable colors, afford a durable protection. There is also a foreign preparation of iron in use, mainly for chandeliers of vestibules fashioned in light mediæval style, that presents in itself a jet black surface that resists oxygenic corrosion; it is also occasionally employed for minor articles, such as inkstands and paper weights, the latter in the form of statuettes.

Although artistic improvement is visible in not a few balconies, there is apparent the want of more original treatment in the fillings. The front of a balcony, usually above the direct line of sight needs special adaptations, which appear generally to be overlooked. The scroll form of projection is decidedly more favorable than the horizontal for viewing the design, and we refer to designs possessing special merit, and not mere skeleton outlines of form, which at an elevation, do not show to advantage. Where heads or figures in the round are introduced, they might advantageously be so adjusted as to meet the upward gaze of the spectator. It is a mystery why elaborately designed balcony fronts should be almost invariably in monochrome, when, where comprised of floral compositions, heads, scrolls, flowing and even stiff renaissance patterns color would give them such brilliance, emphasise their details and bring them out from the dull background as attractive additions to the general monotony of facades.

In artistic iron work, beauty of outline is to be regarded as the first consideration, and more attended to as art knowledge and art taste increase. In rendering ornament subservient to fine form, we give it a distinct vantage ground. To settle all the principles that ought to govern artistic iron work is no easy matter, but there is no question that where figures are introduced, whether in relief or in the round, they should not be united with branches—a combination, by the way, seldom found in the work of French artificers, who incline to admixture of these with scroll work. Surface decoration in relief will always be more pleasing than ornamental adjuncts almost independent. Where relief designs are introduced to decorate construction, they should be clearly defined.

The prominent character of all cast iron work of such articles as gates, ought to be dependent for effect on breadth and general outline, rather than on the number of undivided parts. In interior decoration, much depends on the style of the details, which should be free from stringy tendrils and multiplicity of lines and leaves. The study of the laws of growth, and not the mere copying of a plant or flower, will unfold the secret of gracefully rendering objects from nature. In certain articles cast and wrought iron are combined, but the peculiarities of one cannot well be mistaken for the character of the other, wrought iron being shaped, and the parts being welded at the forge, bolting being resorted to for uniting large pieces.

With all that has been accomplished, we anticipate that under the diffused light of artistic feeling it is all but preliminary to the higher attainments.

THE impulse given to the embroidering of upholstery textiles proceeds apace in the representation of flowers and ornamental designs, particularly for drawing-room furniture, the work being taken up enthusiastically by lady amateurs as a pleasant pastime as well as a means of beautifying their homes. Some of the embroidery for chair and sofa backs is simply worked on square and oblong pieces of canvas, the chromatic arrangements being either to the taste of the maker or to harmonize with the furniture. Suitable flowers, are the lily, passion flower, tulip, cyclamen, poppy, camelia, carnation, geranium, heart's-ease, wild rose, moss rose, woodbine, gloxinia, and honeysuckle. It is a decided error to embroider vases and flowers; the vases destroy the effect of the flowers.

With regard to architecture and all the arts of decoration there is a strange difference between the practice of them, and such study as looks toward practice, on the one hand, and the history and theory of them, with such study as that involves, on the other. Quite completely are these two studies separated, each from the other. A man may be most active and successful as a practicing designer, and successful in an artistic way, too, with no knowledge and little thought of the history of his own branch of art, and with little curiosity as to its philosophy or its poetry. And, on the other hand, a man may be a very earnest student, and a happy and delighted student of the history and criticism of art, and know nothing, and care as little, about the profession and practice of any art, or about studio ways and studio traditions. I do not know that in any branch of human study this distinction is so marked and so strong. This is to be regretted, for many reasons, but it can hardly be done away with so long as the community is generally careless of both the theoretical and the practical—so long as the students and the practitioners alike feel themselves nearly isolated units, floating in a sea of good humored indifference. This state of things only time can alter. Only time can civilize our new community in intellectual and perspective matters; but there are some other conditions which are more immediately in our power to modify, perhaps. Let us see.

It is as true as if it had not been repeated, even to fatigue and boredom, that the arts of decoration have been in a bad way for a good part of the century past, at least among some European and Europeanized nations. I do not imagine that a Frenchman would admit that architecture and the art of decoration had ever languished in his own society. Your cultivated Frenchman would say that some periods were better than others, but that there were no bad periods; he would say that, to be sure, the style of the first Napoleon's empire was not a very fortunate style—too stiff, too absurdly pseudo classic, unworthy of France, a poor enough successor of the dainty and playful art of Louis XV., or the somewhat more refined and restrained art of Louis XVI.; but he would say that it was art still, and the period a not wholly inartistic period; and even of the dull times of the Napoleon of Peace, from 1830 to 1848, while he would confess to a great deal of languor and lack of public spirit of all sorts, except in the struggle in which the romantic artists, headed by Delacroix, waged with the classicists, headed by Ingres; while he would admit that the abundant wood cuts and lithographs, the painting and statues much less abundant even in production, and the buildings very few and unimportant, were not sufficient to make up a great artificial epoch, that is, for France; yet as for its being an epoch without art—such a thing as that, he would say, France had not known since she was France. And he would be right.

But if said of England it would be pretty nearly true. If it were said that the whole amount of art of the decorative kind that existed in England between 1810 and 1850, for instance, would fill but a small museum, and that its quality would fill but slight requirements, it would require a bold Anglophil to contradict. There came a dull pall, like that of her own black fogs, over social London, and the stucco fronted langors of Baker street and Portland place are no worse than the dull monotony of the intervals behind them. Veneered and polished mahogany furniture, very much too large and too heavy for the rooms; black haircloth, like the grave cloths of art, for the covering of everything that could be sat upon; cold, brownish red curtains, with shiny but not lustrous material; silver candlesticks of monstrous design—these, and such as these, were the decorative objects which our fathers or our grandfathers admired, or felt that they must admire for want of better, during the unhappy years that I have cited. The delicate carvings that the furniture of a generation just previous had received were forgotten. People put up with Chippenendale chairs in the dining room because they had belonged to their fathers, and nothing special was offered to take their place; but there is no record that they cared for them. The richer and more fantastic carvings of Grinling Gibbons had never obtained any general recognition nor availed to modify the wood word of the domestic interiors of England. The brocades and flowered silks which the eighteenth century had revealed in, and if in England, not strong enough artistically to produce them itself, had been brought into England from other lands—these were replaced by the dismal things I have alluded to, and no vestige of them seems to have remained in the parlors of that unhappy time.

Richness of costume had disappeared with the wars of the French Revolution. Embroidered silk hats had given place gradually to claret colored and blue broadcloth, and this gave place to black, and all variety in costume had disappeared completely; and now, from 1810 to 1850, fantastically varied and interesting house furnishing and decoration had followed, I suppose it inevitably must follow, costume being, one fears, a necessary part of anything like a prosperous artistic epoch.

Out of this gloomy depression the Anglo Saxon world in England and in this country is trying to emerge. It began its efforts with the perfectly natural conviction that by studying the artistic history of the past something could be done to benefit the arts of the present. The Gothic revival, which you have heard of so much, and which was followed with real ardor and with unquestioning zeal by crowds of devotees for years, beginning with, perhaps, 1840, was an attempt along the most obvious lines—along what seemed to be the line of least resistance, to change the metaphor. To develop anew an old art, which had flourished so greatly in the past—how easy and how certain! How certain were the enthusiasts of that time that by earnestly poring over and closely analyzing and heartily loving the buildings of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such buildings and others like them could be built in the nineteenth! How happy was the conviction of all these men that it was not more difficult than that! The secret of what had been done was to be found in the phenomena themselves. There, in this parish church, in this cathedral, lay the secret of their charm. Let us analyze first, they said, and let us put together again the ingredients that our analysis shall have discovered, and we will recreate the thing that we are in search of.

In like manner, in the minor arts the people of 1850 felt, or some of them did, that they did not know how to weave curtains that it was worth anyone's while to hang up, except to shut out the light and shut in the warmth, that so far as beauty of texture, beauty of pattern and beauty of color went, they were powerless to produce anything of any avail. But they saw that the Venetians of the sixteenth century, and Florentines of the seventeenth century, and the French of the eighteenth century, had produced splendid stuffs; and although there were no museums in those days that condescended to anything so humble such stuffs were still to be bought of the bric-a-brac dealers, and very cheap, too, and still existed rolled up in some old garrets. By studying them, surely the art of making others like them could be learned. And so around the whole circle of the arts of decoration it was believed, and in thoroughly good faith, and with, as it seemed, perfectly good reason, that the study of what had been would suffice, with zeal and patience and good will, to the production of what should be.

* From a recent address to the architects of Brooklyn.